

Noise in Two Acts - Act 2

Continuing the topic "audiograms" or hearing tests: these should be done on any new employee, not just those in noisy jobs. You want to be sure people can in fact hear, especially if their job requires it, like driving a forklift. Also a pre-existing loss can be documented, so there is less chance of any hearing loss Worker's Comp claim.

At each subsequent annual hearing test for noise-exposed employees, a loss of 10 dB or more in either ear is called a Standard Threshold Shift (STS). Employees must be told in writing if they have one, and it can be verified by a retesting. A person with an STS exposed above 85 dB (not 90) has to wear hearing protection. You also have to record an STS on the OSHA 300 Log.

You need the document that people wear hearing protection. Check to see if hearing protection is being used. If people still exhibit a hearing loss, and they're wearing hearing protection, there are two things that may be happening: and you have to document both.

The first is the **hearing protection may be inadequate**. Hearing protection has a Noise Reduction Rating. Subtract the NRR from the noise levels to ensure <85 dB reaches the eardrum (use 83 to be really sure).

It seems simple: an NRR of 25 should adequately protect from 107 dB, as $107 - 25 = 82$; and 82 is less than 85. Of course it is never that simple, as noise is measured with an A-weighting scale, and NRR uses a C-weighting scale (There is a B-weighting scale, it's just that no one ever talks about it). To properly evaluate the NRR, subtract 7 from the NRR. So in the example above the math becomes $107 - (25-7) = 89$ dBA; **not effective**.

Note you can double up (plugs and muffs) for extreme noise levels: but NRRs of 25 and 22 do not equal 47. The deciBel scale is logarithmic, and high noise can reach the eardrum via bone conduction. Double protection has an NRR of around 38.

The other reason people may still be experiencing hearing loss is due to **personal hobbies and activities outside the workplace**. Motorcycles, hunting, playing in a band can all result in hearing loss. Document non-work-related noise, and counsel folks to wear hearing protection outside of work. Note that age does cause hearing loss in and of itself, however hearing tests should correct for this factor using published reference tables.

Getting back to Worker's Compensation - if a claim is made today by an employee who worked at a noisy facility for three decades, it could be hard to defend. Frankly because you probably don't have the data: no baseline audiogram, no noise exposure data; and no records of a person wearing hearing protection. And be aware sometimes folks will file a Comp claim in one ear only, then file for the other ear in a month or two. If you get a "one ear claim" try and have both ears tested and filed together, as it will be far less costly.

However if your records going forward document all these things we've covered, any Worker's Comp claim in 5 or 10 years for hearing loss will most likely not be valid.

And at the same time you have protected someone's hearing, which was the original intention of the OSHA regulation.

App Corner - DropBox

Not specifically an App, but more of a service that has an App component, is DropBox - a data storage service.

DropBox (and there are others) is cloud-based, where you can store all manner of files, from documents to pictures to movies. They stay in sync in any device that has an Internet connection. If you forgot your laptop, using your phone you can still pull up the files. You can share folders with others, and files are backed up, which is peace of mind.